



A Member of America's Second Harvest
450 Woodland Ave, Bloomfield, CT 06002-1342
Phone (860) 286-9999 Fax (860) 286-7860
On the web: <http://www.foodshare.org>

**Testimony before the Human Services Sub-Committee
Of the Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
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Presented by:
Sarah Santora
Community Involvement Coordinator, Foodshare

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Santora. I am the Community Involvement Coordinator at Foodshare and am here representing our CEO, Gloria McAdam, who could not be with you today. In the past four years I have coordinated volunteering, educational initiatives and now do community outreach and advocacy work for Foodshare.

As you may know Foodshare is the regional food bank serving the greater Hartford area. I welcome this opportunity to comment on the state's Nutrition Assistance Program and how it supports the work of our local community food pantries.

It's important that we look at the big picture. Hunger is a problem throughout Connecticut. There is now at least one private agency providing food to people in need in every town in the greater Hartford region and over 500 such local agencies around our state.

Last year, Foodshare distributed 11 million pounds of food to 400 local organizations that feed hungry people right here in the greater Hartford area. This is about 15 tons of food each and every day of the year, more than a tractor-trailer load of food getting out to people in need every single day!

Some people hear about Foodshare, and think, "Wow, the private sector can take care of the problem of hunger." I'm here to tell you first and foremost -- that is wrong! Yes, 11 million pounds of food per year is a lot of food. But through our partner agencies, Foodshare serves 100,000 people in greater Hartford each year. You can do this math in your head. 11 million pounds of food divided up among 100,000 people works out to about 110 pounds of food per person per year. About two pounds of food per week, when most of us eat about a pound of food each and every time we sit down for a meal. Foodshare could double or triple in size and it still would not be enough!

None of us at Foodshare would suggest that Foodshare should double or triple in size or even that it's possible. Private charities do not have enough food, enough volunteers, or enough money to end hunger in our midst.

We believe that ensuring that everyone has access to enough nutritious food to sustain themselves and lead healthy and productive lives is the responsibility of the entire community – government and charities, individuals and organizations. We in the private, charitable sector need government to do its share if we are to end hunger in Connecticut.

One way the state makes a difference in this effort is with the state Nutrition Assistance Program. The Nutrition Assistance Program provides needed dollars for the state's two food banks to purchase high protein foods to supplement the donations received from the food industry. Since the program's inception in 1988, it has operated with an annual budget of about \$400,000. Because of the increasing number of agencies taking part in the program and the rapidly rising cost of food, each soup kitchen or food pantry in the state gets significantly less food from state Nutrition Assistance than they did ten years ago. This at a time when demand has been rising by 20-25% per year. The more funding there is, the more our partner agencies are able to meet increased demand with a consistent supply of high quality protein like beef stew, frozen meats and canned meals.

Knowing how challenging the current budget situation is, all of us working on feeding our hungry neighbors are grateful to Governor Rell for including an additional \$200,000 for this program in her budget. We urge you to keep that funding increase in the final budget.

At the same time, we know that many of our neighboring states are way ahead of us. In Massachusetts, with roughly double our population and a similar poverty rate to CT, they fund their state program at **\$12 million**, six times what we spend! New York appropriates \$24.5 million, New Jersey \$4 million, and Pennsylvania is spending \$18.75 million per year on high quality protein foods. Even with current budget conditions, New York recently found room to expand this important program to help meet people's basic needs in difficult times.

Again, recognizing the difficulties this year's budget process faces, we urge you to look at any ways to further increase the funding for food purchase through state Nutrition Assistance year. Remember that every penny of these funds goes directly to the purchase of high-nutrition food for the poorest of our neighbors in Connecticut.

Thank you.